CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

State of Wisconsin

DATE: July 16, 2004 FILE REF: [Click **here** and type file ref.]

TO: Rest Lake Dam/Manitowish River Work Group

FROM: Jim Kreitlow

SUBJECT: Minutes of our June 23rd, 2004 meeting.

I want to thank all the group members who attended our fourth meeting on June 23rd, 2004. The purpose of the meeting was to provide additional background information on sturgeon, hear upstream user concerns, introduce preliminary options for operational change to consider and to introduce a Rest Lake Chain water level evaluation proposal. Ultimately this information presented and discussed at this meeting and future meetings will help us determine/evaluate options or proposals for operational change that we all can agree to.

I will summarize the meeting following the three information items that were presented.

1. Sturgeon work in Lake Winnebago and Fox/Wolf River Systems (statewide perspective)-Ron Bruch, Fisheries Biologist, Oshkosh.
2. Upstream User Concerns-Jack King, Manitowish Waters Lakes Association.
3. What have we learned so far? Preliminary options for operational changes to consider. Jim Kreitlow, WDNR.
4. Rest Lake Chain water level evaluation study proposal-Bob Martini, WDNR

I want to thank Ron, Jack and Bob for their excellent presentations and taking the time to speak to the group.

Participants

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5. Jim Klosiewski, WDNR, Rhinelander, WI. Klosij@dnr.state.wi.us 365-8992.
6. Ron Bruch, WDNR, Oshkosh, WI. Bruchr@dnr.state.wi.us
7. Steve Jaeger, WDNR, Madison WI. Jaegers@dnr.state.wi.us 608-267-7657.
8. Jeff Roth, WDNR. 5291 Statehouse Circle, Mercer, WI. Rothj@dnr.state.wi.us 476-7847.
9. John Hansen, Town Chairman, 217 Spider Lake Road, Manitowish Waters, WI. 54545 Jlhmjh@centurytel.net 543-2438.
10. Les Jacobson, Friends of the Manitowish River, PO Box 202, Manitowish Waters, WI. 54545. 543-2501
11. Bob and Helen Townsend, Friends of the Manitowish River, 73 River Access Road, Manitowish Waters, WI. 54545. Bhtownsend@yahoo.com 543-2166.
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15. Joe Stengele, 321 Point O' Pines Road Manitowish Waters WI. 54545.
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23. Jerry Drennen, jerry.drennen@ett.net 543-8150.
24. Kathy Drennen, k.drennen@ett.net 847-336-1350.

Members Absent

1. Pete Rasey, Manitowish Waters Lakes Association, 543-2176.
2. Ronald Gaa, Manitowish Waters Alliance PO Box 9, Manitowish Waters, 54545. 543-2505 Fax 543-2188.
3. Judi Schmidt Arnold, Manitowish Waters Alliance, PO Box 98, Manitowish Waters, 54545. Judisa@shrealty.com 543-2300.
4. Mona Weichmann, Manitowish Waters Lakes Association, 543-2562.
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6. Tom Feldkamp, tfeldkamp@centurytel.net 543-2149 Fax 543-2150.
7. Arlen Wanta, Turtle Flambeau-Trude Lake Property Owners Association, 2795 North Flowage Road, Park Falls, WI.
8. Jim Leever, Turtle Flambeau-Trude Lake Property Owners Association, 4792 West Franks Lane, Park Falls, WI.
9. John Bates, Friends of the Manitowish River, 4245 North Highway 47, Mercer WI. 54547 476-2828.
10. Greg Holt, Friends of the Manitowish River, holthorse@centurytel.net
11. Rita Mazer, Manitowish Waters Lakes Association, 288 Highway 51, Manitowish Waters WI. 54545 543-2538.
12. Harland Klagos, Manitowish Waters Alliance, 40 West Bay Road, Manitowish Waters, WI. 54545. Klagos@centurytel.net 543-8246.
13. Don Rayala, Manitowish Waters Alliance, 325 Alder Lake Road, Manitowish Waters WI. 54545. 543-2225.
14. Eleanor Butler, PO Box 157 Manitowish Waters, WI. 54545. Enzymes@centurytel.net
15. Mark Charon, Friends of the Manitowish River, parasustema@hotmail.com
16. Tom Mowbray, Turtle Flambeau-Trude Lake Property Owners Association, TFTLKassoc@aol.com
17. Carl Sevey, Alder Lake.

Agenda

Sturgeon work in Lake Winnebago and Fox/Wolf River Systems (statewide perspective)

Ron Bruch provided an overview of the life history requirements of the Lake Sturgeon. He also showed a video (Life, Legend, Legacy: Wisconsin's Lake Sturgeon) covering the historical, cultural and economic significance of the Lake Sturgeon in Wisconsin.

Lake Sturgeon have been around for 100-150 million years. They are prehistoric looking fish. A female can live up to 100 years and a male up to 40 years old. A female will not reach sexual maturity (spawning age) until 20-25 years; a male will not spawn until 12-15 years. Once sexually mature a female will spawn every 3-5 years whereas a male will spawn every year or every other year. There are 25-28 species of sturgeon in the world today.

The decline of sturgeon in Wisconsin and around the U.S. is due to over-exploitation, habitat loss, and construction of dams and water quality degradation. Providing suitable habitat and water flows are important for sturgeon survival. Spawning Lake Sturgeon require water depths of at least 18 inches, water velocity of 0.5-1.5 meters per second and cobble/boulder substrate. The Manitowish River has suitable habitat.

Lake Sturgeon will spawn over cobble/boulder habitat. The interstitial spaces amongst the rocks are very important. Eggs that drop down into these spaces are protected and have the best chance of hatching. Optimal sturgeon spawning temperature is between 53-56 F with a range of 48-68 F. It takes around 10 days for the eggs to hatch and about 10 days for them to emerge. They usually emerge at night and drift downstream to and inhabit the main river channel adjacent to sand or pea gravel bars. Young sturgeon will survive on zooplankton and insects where adults will feed on almost anything.

A copy of the sturgeon video is available from Jim Kreitlow.

Upstream User Concerns

Jack King read the following prepared statement.

It seems to some of us the DNR is trying to solve a puzzle that was created 100 years ago when the loggers got approval to build the first dam.

A tremendous amount of time and energy, not to mention money, is being spent on two problems which seem to be interrelated, but which need to be split. One is a question of natural sturgeon reproduction. The other is how to regulate the flow of water from the dam so as to prevent property damage and flooding loon nests downstream. And these two issues need to be recognized as such - two separate and distinct questions, the answers for which, if there are answers, are also probably going to be different. So let's take the downstream problem first. There is much anecdotal evidence of washouts, and basements, piers, and boathouses being flooded or carried away. And these are real enough to the people who have experienced them. The DNR, then, needs to set up monitoring stations to document these occurrences. But in the final analysis, this is a question of flow rate over the dam, caused either by natural weather conditions or a lack of fine-tuning in dam operations. How you can fine tune 4 X 4's or 6 X 6's is way beyond me!

This is an important issue, and when I finish I'd like to hear from the Friends of the MW River about what they would like in terms of water flow and when they would like it.

But first, let's talk about sturgeon.

In Jim's initial "issue paper", he suggested at least five possibilities for lack of reproduction that would be investigated. These were low flows, warm water temperature, lack of water or fluctuation levels at spawning time, rusty crayfish feeding on eggs and predation by redhorse. All these were "maybes", and I may have missed something, but I'm not aware that any of them have yet been proven to be a primary or secondary cause.

Nevertheless, the DNR has continued from the outset to focus on flow rate and water levels although at our first full meeting last November, a major concern expressed was to eliminate all the non-water possibilities before any operational changes were instituted.

If we were to agree tomorrow to a trial drawdown, I'm sure we're not talking about one year but multiple years. This would be necessary in order to give the theories about the lack of sturgeon spawning and reproduction sufficient time to play out. I and members of our Lakes Association Board would then be in the position of having to defend this action to our constituent members. We can't do that. There simply isn't sufficient evidence that shallow water and/or slow water flow are the only causes of reproduction failure.

The Wisconsin Lake Sturgeon Management Plan has a long list of sites in the state where sturgeon occurs - some 30 or more. The species is on "watch" status with the DNR. And yet a June 2001 issue of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine carried an article on sturgeon and stated that the Winnebago/Wolf River system had 50-60 spawning sites, and in the year 2000 an estimated 9,000 adult spawning females and 27,000 adult spawning males.

Additional spawning sites are in the Menominee, St. Croix, Namekogan, Chippewa and Flambeau Rivers and Lake Wisconsin. Also, as of the year 2000, the DNR's Wild Rose hatchery was raising 40,000 fingerlings annually.

The Management Plan also lists 14 or 15 major priority sites for Lake Sturgeon Rehabilitation efforts. These include the Upper Flambeau River - Manitowish River systems. I assume this to mean from High Lake to the Flowage Dam. Why isn't the Manitowish River above the Chain being considered for spawning? Sturgeon can be introduced as they have been in other Wisconsin lakes.
In the meantime, we have a statewide problem, which dwarfs that of reintroducing natural sturgeon reproduction into a one-mile stretch of the Manitowish River. And that problem is Invasive or Exotic Species.

Every year shows further encroachment of Eurasian Water Milfoil, Zebra Mussels, Curly Leaf Pondweed, Rusty Crayfish, Spiny Waterflea and the like. Laura Herman, at a meeting last year, told us not to be too complacent about getting these under control - there are 160 other species in the Great Lakes that have yet to move inland.

But if the ones that are in Wisconsin lakes right now take hold in our Northern lakes, they will change the ecology of all our waters, not to mention the economy of the towns that depend on them, perhaps irreparably. I don't see any great excitement in the DNR hierarchy about this except for a few dedicated but sadly underfunded individuals. Nor have I seen a "Management Plan" backed by real money to uphold the State's promise as represented by the Public Trust Doctrine, which mandates that, the State of Wisconsin has the responsibility for protecting all public waters for its citizens.

I won't disparage Jim and his group's efforts and research over the past months, but I would think that the State would have every DNR person remotely connected to water quality, spending all of their available

time on this problem. You don't need me to tell you that it's far more serious than trying to propagate sturgeon in a single river. This is not meant as a slam on the DNR or those who would like to have their grandchildren see sturgeon, but it is a measure of our frustration over anticipating a possible change in a system which governs the lake levels of our 10 lake chain and which has been in place for 65 years or longer, while real and perhaps irreversible change affecting every water body in the state is just around the corner.

I said earlier that I'd like to hear more from the Friends of the MW River about what they would like in terms of water flow and when they would like it.

What have we learned so far? Preliminary options for operational changes to consider.

Jim Kreitlow gave a power point presentation summarizing what we have learned so far. He also laid out some preliminary options for work group members to think about. The power point presentation is available on the webpage to review (*http://dnr.wi.us.gov/org/gmu/upwis/index.htm*).

Rest Lake Chain water level evaluation study proposal

One of the main issues associated with changing the Manitowish Chain winter drawdown to reduce the adverse impact of low flows on sturgeon spawning is potential ice damage to shoreline structures. Our goals in this draft proposal are to:

1. Estimate the possible impacts of winter water levels on shoreline structures.
2. Involve property owners in the collection of data needed for the analysis while increasing shoreland owners' awareness of the public interest flow regime review project on the Manitowish Chain.

These goals can be accomplished by:

A. Sending shoreline taxpayers a description of the project (with webpage access information so that more detailed info can be accessed by the landowner).
B. Asking the landowner to spraypaint a watermark on the portion of his shoreline structures that is most likely to be damaged by winter ice, photographing that structure and water mark and measuring the vertical distance to the maximum water level
C. Carrying out the process in B. at full pool, one foot below full, two feet below full and 2.6 feet below full pool when those elevations occur during the fall drawdown period. The necessary water level notifications will be posted on our website and noticed on a sign at the dam when water levels are at full pool, one, two and 2.6 feet below full.
D. Photos and measurements along with name, address, and phone number of the shoreline owner will be sent to the department or the Town Chairman and analyzed by the Dept. and other members of the project team.
E. Selected locations will be "ground truthed" by Dept staff for quality assurance and additional data collection.
F. Landowners who are unable to participate will be asked to request the Dept. or another project partner to take the measurements on their behalf.

It is hoped that a representative number of owners most likely to sustain damage will participate. The goal of the project is to complete a semi-quantitative damage estimate by spring, 2005.

After allot of discussion, work group members agreed to the concept to involve land owners and that that the DNR should pursue this. More thought would have to be devoted to this, but the DNR would have to:

1. Develop a survey or procedure the landowner could follow.
2. John Hansen would obtain a listing of landowners living on the chain (for mailing purposes).
3. Determine cost of mailing.
4. Determine where the results should be sent (DNR or Town Chairman).

Next Meeting

Late summer

Tentative Agenda (Subject to change)

Please send me any agenda items.

Thank You